

MAYWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
400 N.E. 9th Street  
Oklahoma City  
Oklahoma County  
Oklahoma

HABS No. OK-45

HABS  
OKLA,  
55-OKLA,  
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

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Location:

400 N.E. 9th Street  
(Maywood Addition to Oklahoma City, Block 14, lots 10, 11, 12)

Present Owner:

Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority

Present Occupant:

Vacant

Present Use:

Vacant

Statement of Significance:

Architecturally, the Maywood Presbyterian Church is significant as a good example of Victorian Romanesque ecclesiastical styling with elements of Gothic Revival. Once a popular style, buildings with this rich combination of arches, towers, decorative excess, and brick veneer are rapidly disappearing in Oklahoma City. The church building also is significant for historic reasons. It was one of Oklahoma City's first suburban churches, built in an undeveloped addition more than a mile from the downtown business district, and it stands as the physical legacy of one small congregation's dramatic commitment to building their own place of worship.

In May of 1985 the Maywood Presbyterian Church was declared eligible for the National Register of Historic Places by the Office of Historic Preservation.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection:

May, 1907 to July, 1908

Architect:

William N. Meredith

### Historical Narrative

On August 8, 1900, the Reverends T.S. Buchanan and A.L. Phelps, with the help of 32 believers, organized the Cumberland Presbyterian Church of Oklahoma City. Supported by the Cumberland Board of Missions, the congregation built a small frame church at N.E. 5th and Harrison.

The congregation grew with Oklahoma City during this era of prosperity, and in 1905 they installed a new minister, E.O. Whitwell. Reverend Whitwell was a dynamic leader who led a movement to build a new church structure, even though the congregation still numbered only about 200 men, women, and children. In February of 1907, responding to his leadership, the church members agreed to start a fund drive to raise \$25,000.

At this time Oklahoma City was experiencing a tremendous building boom. In March of 1907 one estimate placed church construction then underway at more than \$500,000. Most of the structures were downtown, such as St. Luke's Methodist, St. Paul's Episcopal, and First Baptist.

In that very month, on March 25, 1907, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church purchased three lots just off of Stiles Circle, a suburban landmark that was just beyond the cutting edge of new home construction. To pay the \$3,200 lot purchase price, as well as to hire an architect to develop plans, the congregation raised \$10,000 within a matter of weeks. The architect chosen for the project was William N. Meredith.

On April 6, 1907, Meredith announced that plans for the church were almost complete. According to his design, the basement would have a gymnasium, kitchen, and bath rooms. The first floor would be the main auditorium with separate areas for a reading room, a parlor, and a pastor's study. The second floor would be a gallery from which congregation members could see and hear the minister. With these plans approved, excavation began on June 27, 1907.

Several problems hindered the project. First, in July it was discovered that the lots were not as wide as thought at the time of purchase; the floorplan was narrowed by four feet. Then, on July 26, the general contractor, W.S. Crawford, walked off the job and removed all materials; when a new contractor could not be secured with available funds, Reverend Whitwell assumed all contracting responsibilities. Pervading all this was the money problem when the fund raising campaign came up short, due in large part to the financial panic of 1907. As a result, Whitwell and church members did much of the actual labor, saving an estimated \$10,000. They also borrowed \$5,000 from the Presbyterian Church General Building Fund and \$2,500 from Reverend Whitwell.

On July 5, 1908, the new church building was dedicated as the Maywood Presbyterian Church, a new name officially adopted by the congregation. As completed, seating capacity was 1,000, the auditorium was carpeted with Axminster rugs, the pews were oak, and there were three large stained-glass windows. Other features were much as planned by Meredith.

Although it was built in the town's first suburban addition, the church gradually was left behind in the subsequent growth of Oklahoma City. While suburban flight eroded membership, the neighborhood around the church gradually became a battleground of racial tensions. Since the turn of the century, the black population of Oklahoma City had been pressing north and east from the railroad yards and the river bottom. Most white residents in the path of this natural population growth at first resisted, then moved when racial barriers fell on their streets. This expansion of the black community, with the concomitant white flight, engulfed the neighborhood around the Maywood Presbyterian Church during the late 1920s and 1930s.

In 1946 the white congregation of Maywood Presbyterian decided to unite with the Culbertson Presbyterian Church, also located in a neighborhood that was making the transition from white to black. Together, they created the Capitol Presbyterian Church at N.E. 21st and Kelly.

In December of 1946 the Board of Trustees of the Maywood Church voted to sell the building at 9th and Stiles to the Irving Baptist Church, a black congregation that had been meeting at 308 N.E. 7th Street. The new congregation, which paid \$35,000 for the structure, made a few changes in the pulpit area, adding a baptismal tank behind the podium. Also, by this time a series of partitions had been added on the second floor behind the gallery. In 1956 Irving Baptist sold the church to the New Zion Baptist Church.

By August of 1980 the old Maywood Presbyterian Church Building had been abandoned as a place of worship and many of the fixtures sold at auction. The aging structure was then sold to real estate speculator, J.D. Lobb. Lobb removed the cornerstone and found a time capsule, then replaced the stone and eventually sold the entire building.

The new owners attempted a remodeling. They removed all windows and replaced them with aluminum frame windows. They added floor joists to the open area on the second level and partially completed framed walls on the first level. They also built scaffolding around the tower. All of this work was never completed and the building continued to deteriorate. Eventually it was condemned and purchased by the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority. Today, the old Maywood Presbyterian Church is a dim reflection of its former self.

### Biographical Information--William N. Meredith

Little is known about Meredith, other than he came to Oklahoma City about 1903 and apparently died about 1915. In the city directories of this period he was listed as an "architect" with offices in buildings such as the 2 Canadian Block and the Scott Thompson Building. In 1907, when work began on the Maywood Presbyterian Church, he lived at 507 E. 7th, only about two blocks away from the congregation's original frame church. Perhaps he was a member of the church, or at least an acquaintance of a member. Meredith does not appear in any who's whos of the period, and special editions of the newspaper that give brief descriptions of architects do not mention him. He probably was an independent architect who survived on small projects during this boom era of Oklahoma City's history.

### ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The Maywood Presbyterian Church is of architectural merit based on the facade's rich mixture of Victorian Romanesque and Gothic Revival features.
2. Condition of Fabric: Poor (foundation and brick walls are in good condition, but all windows are either open, boarded over, or replaced with modern aluminum sashes; the roof needs extensive repair, and the interior is in a state of complete deterioration).
3. Summary Description: The Maywood Presbyterian Church is a two-story, red brick building with a partially exposed, coursed stone basement. Accents of buff brick and stone create a high contrast polychrome appearance. The decorative and stylistic elements make this building a good example of the Victorian Romanesque style with elements of Gothic Revival.

The overall design of the church is an equilinear, transept cruciform carried through on all sides with attachments of towers on three corners and a non-symmetrical but matching element on the southeast corner. Each transept is repetitive with rectangular windows in the basement and first story level and a large arched window that projects into the gabled area. The end of each transept is flanked by projecting brick pilasters extending from the basement level to above the roof line topped with domed caps. The point of each gable is capped with a pinnacle rising from the gable trim. Transepts join into the pitched roof at a level below its uppermost peak.

There are three corner towers which flank the west and north facades. The northwest corner tower is topped with a pyramidal bell tower roof and corner pinnacles capped with finials. On the second and third levels the tower has double, arrow loop motif windows accented on the third level with U-shaped dripstone hood

molds. At the base of the tower is the primary entry which features a pedimented, projecting, half-story, double door entrance with stone steps. Below the entry stairs is an arched opening leading immediately to descending steps to the basement level.

The two towers on the southwest and northeast are topped with metal battlements and have the arrow loop windows on their third levels only. The second levels feature dual level, eyebrow hood molds and corbelled hood stops of buff brick and, as with all windows on the second level, feature molded, corbel supported stone sills.

The sills of the basement windows are independent, while the first level windows here and throughout the building are formed by a continuous belt course of white stone. These two towers feature corner pilasters of brick of alternating color giving the appearance of buttresses.

#### Detailed Description of Exterior

1. Foundation: Masonry (limestone blocks of alternating rough and smooth textured courses) and reinforced concrete

2. Wall Construction: Brick and stone

3. Porches: A small portico covers the main entrance on the west side below the bell tower. The portico is supported by a pair of doric wood columns sitting on a low masonry wall. Below the porch is an arched opening leading to a door that opens to the basement. The steps leading to the porch appear to be fairly recent additions incorporating cement blocks. Another small porch leads to two doors on the south side near the southeast corner. It is covered by a small portico.

4. Openings, Doorways, and Windows: Doors are located at the main entry below the bell tower (a double door); one door below the main entry leading to the basement; two doors on the south side of the building, one leading to the first floor auditorium, the other to the pulpit area; and there is one door on the east side leading into the basement. None of the current doors appear to be original.

Windows on the first level and basement level are rectangular with stone lintels. Arched windows on the second and third levels possess dual-level eyebrow hood molds and corbelled hood stops of contrasting buff brick, giving the windows the appearance of compound arches. This detailing is carried out by projecting layers of buff brick leading to molded sills supported by corbels. The gable area above each arched window is penetrated by arrow loop motif windows with dripstone hood mold and molded sills. Originally, glass in the first, second, and third level

windows was stained art glass. Basement windows appear to have had standard rolled glass. Present windows are either boarded over, open, or enclosed with painted aluminum replacements (one over one or fixed pane).

5. Roof: The main roof is hipped and was probably originally covered with wooden shingles. The present roof is partially covered with asphalt shingles. The roof of the tower may have been red tile; today, the tiles are gone, exposing the decking.

#### Detailed Description of Interior

1. Floor Plans: The basement can be entered from two doors, one on the east side, the other on the west side. Upon entering the east door you enter what looks like a mechanical room. Just to the south is a large room with concrete floors that was a gymnasium. Two large rooms along the west wall originally were kitchens, bathrooms, and storage. The walls are concrete covered with plaster. The floors are concrete on grade.

The first floor has a main entry at the northwest corner. After entering double doors, a short hallway leads diagonally to the main auditorium. Along the west side of the floor is a room enclosed by vertical sliding doors. Originally this was an "Endeavor Room." Along the north wall are two rooms also enclosed by the vertical sliding doors; these originally were Sunday School rooms. Today, much of the facing wood and sliding doors is missing or damaged. At the southeast corner of the floor is the pulpit area with a sunken floor. It has been significantly altered. The bulk of the floor is the old auditorium. Originally lined with oak pews, it now is broken up by partially completed framed walls. The original walls were covered with plaster, which now is in extremely deteriorated condition.

The second floor, which is reached by a stairway near the northwest corner entry, originally was only a half floor consisting of a gallery. The original gallery opening started about 15 feet from the northeast corner and circled gradually to a point about 30 feet from the southwest corner. Recent owners covered this open area with heavy ceiling joists but did not finish the decking. Sometime after the original opening of the church, two rooms were added to the gallery, one on the northeast corner, the other on the southwest corner. An original small room was located on the northwest corner behind the stairwell and directly above the entry below.

2. Stairways: The main stairway is located on the northwest corner of the building. After entering the main entryway, the stairs begin to the right and make 90 degree turns to the second level. The stairs are in poor condition.

3. Flooring: The floors are in extremely poor condition throughout the church. Only small sections of the original wood floors are evident; the rest is covered with plywood or vinyl tiles.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Exterior walls are brick coated with plaster. Every wall is in extremely poor condition. Interior partitions are generally lathe and plaster, but some wallboard has been added. The vaulted ceiling consists of a super-structure of massive wooden beams constructed from four two-by-tens. These are tied together by decking, lathe, and plaster. All ceilings are in poor condition.
5. Doorways, Doors, and Windows: The original interior must have been flooded with light from external windows. From the gallery the three large arched windows are visible, along with several of the smaller windows. All have been completely altered.
6. Interior Trim: The only original interior trim is found in the auditorium on the interior partitions. Some of the hardwood sliding panels are still in place, although they have been damaged from age and the recent attempt at remodeling. Other existing trim is either damaged or of modern origin.
7. Hardware: The only original hardware consists of a few ceiling light fixture bases. They are non-decorative pressed tin. All other fixtures have been removed.
8. Mechanical and Electrical Equipment: Steam heat was undoubtedly the original heating system with individually controlled radiators. All systems, however, have been removed.

#### Site and Surroundings

When constructed, the church was near Stiles Circle, one of Oklahoma City's first European-style circles. Today, the area around the church is largely vacant lots, the result of active urban renewal activity.

#### SOURCES OF PROJECT INFORMATION

As part of an urban renewal project, the neighborhood surrounding the Maywood Presbyterian Church was surveyed by Entourage, Inc., of San Antonio, Texas, in 1984. The published document was "Harrison-Walnut Historic Survey Report, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, A History." Copies are deposited in the Oklahoma Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Another, more limited survey was conducted in 1985 by city consultant, Sandra Stratton, who partially completed a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for the church.



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